

AMENDMENT(S) TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method of separating a strip of semi-compliant material into discrete portions, comprising the steps of:

a) providing an apparatus having angle adjustment means for establishing a desired feed angle of the semi-compliant material into a housing positioned at a support angle from a support surface, said angle adjustment means including an actuator for adjustably moving the housing to a desired support angle, wherein the support angle of the housing is oblique to the support surface;

b) adjustably moving the housing to the desired support angle to establish the desired feed angle of the semi-compliant material into the housing;

c) feeding the semi-compliant material into the housing having at least one drive mechanism which moves the semi-compliant material through the housing;

d) bending the semi-compliant material in a first bending direction, thereby forming a line of weakening along the semi-compliant material; and

e) bending the semi-compliant material in a second bending direction opposite to the first bending direction, thereby separating a portion of the semi-compliant material from the semi-compliant material along the line of weakening.

2. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of bending the semi-compliant material occurs along substantially a 180° turn along each of the first and second bending directions.

3. (Original) The method according to claim 2, further comprising the steps of:  
guiding a first belt along a first path;  
guiding a second belt along a second a path;  
merging the first and second belts between upstream and downstream stretches of the first and second paths, thereby forming an intermediary stretch common to the first and second path;  
sandwiching the strip of the semi-compliant material between the first and second belts along the intermediary stretch, the intermediary stretch having an upstream portion running into at least one downstream portion upon making the 180° turn, so that the upstream and at least one downstream portions of the intermediary stretch extend in substantially opposite linear directions within the housing.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Original) The method according to claim 3, further comprising the steps of  
mounting a plurality of bearing rollers to the housing to guide the belts and the strip along the intermediary stretch, and

mounting a plurality of guides to the housing along the upstream and at least one downstream portions of the intermediary stretch so that each of the guides is located downstream from a respective one of the bearing rollers and is shaped to guide the strip of semi-compliant material sandwiched between the belts along a respective substantially 180° turn.

6. (Withdrawn) An apparatus for separating a strip of semi-compliant material into discrete portions, comprising:

a housing; and

a drive mechanism disposed within the housing and configured to convey the strip of semi-compliant material along a first travel direction to a first flexing station bending the semi-compliant material in a first bending direction to form a line of weakening along the semi-compliant material, the drive mechanism subsequently conveying the strip of semi-compliant material along a second travel direction opposite to the first travel direction towards at least one second flexing station configured to bend the semi-compliant material in a second bending direction along the line of weakening to separate a respective discrete portion from a remaining portion of the strip of semi-compliant material.

7. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising a feeder for feeding the strip of semi-compliant material into the housing at a desirable feeding angle.

8. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the drive mechanism includes a plurality of bearing rollers guiding a pair of belts along separate paths, which have in common an intermediary stretch extending in the first and second travel directions between the first and at least one second flexing stations, the belts sandwiching the strip of semi-compliant material along the intermediary stretch.

9. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the feeder includes at least one feed roller.

10. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising a motor for activating the drive mechanism.

11. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the semi-compliant material includes multiple notches each facilitating separation of a respective discrete portion from the portion of the strip of semi-compliant material.

12. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising at least one guide roller for controlling the strip of semi-compliant material during displacement thereof through the housing.

13. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the apparatus is selectively engageable with a printer, which prints indicia on the material.

14. (Withdrawn) A device according to claim 7, further comprising an actuator mounted on a support surface and coupled to and displacing the housing relative to the support surface to establish the desirable feeding angle selected to facilitate separation of the discreet portions along the weakening lines of the semi-compliant material.

15. (Withdrawn) A device according to claim 8, further comprising at least one belt guide displaceably mounted to the housing and configured to provide the pair of belts and the strip of semi-compliant material with at least one turn between the first and second travel directions.

16. (Withdrawn) An apparatus of claim 15, wherein the at least one guide has a shape selected from the group consisting of a circular shape, triangular shape, trapezoidal shape and combinations thereof.

17. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 8, wherein an inner facing surface of at least one belt is treated with a substance to facilitate handling and separation.

18. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the motor is a variable speed motor for controlling the speed of the drive mechanism.

19. (New) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the actuator includes a piston and cylinder.